

General Barnidge began his Air Force service as I did, through the Reserve Officer Training Corps, and was commissioned as an officer in 1971. Since then, he has held a variety of operations and maintenance assignments, including major command and joint staff billets. He is experienced in aircrew operations, flight line maintenance and combat support activities. The general has also performed major command staff and executive support functions, as well as duties as a force planner and division chief in the joint staff. He has commanded a combat crew training squadron, a logistics group, an operations group, a B-1B bomb wing at Ellsworth, and the B-2 wing at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri.

General Barnidge also completed the program for senior officials in national security at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and Seminar XXI, Foreign Political and International Relations, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He received special recognition in 1999 as the winner of the Air Combat Command Moller Trophy, recognizing him as the best among all 28 wing commanders. General Barnidge has amassed over 2,900 hours in the T-37, T-38, OV-10, B-52G, B-1B, and B-2 aircraft.

In his years of working with the Congress, General Barnidge provided a clear and credible voice for the Air Force, consistently providing accurate, concise and timely information. His integrity, professionalism, and expertise enabled him to develop and maintain an exceptional rapport between the Air Force and the Congress.

On behalf of the Congress and the country, I thank General Barnidge, his wife Sandy, and his entire family for their commitment and many sacrifices. Sandy always went out of her way to make my staff and me feel welcome, and I know she, too, has done much for the Air Force and her country during the past 32 years. Thanks to both of you for a job well done. On behalf of a grateful nation, we wish you all the best during your retirement.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND CULTURE

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am pleased to join Senators BROWNBACK and DODD to introduce legislation authorizing the establishment of the National Museum of African American History and Culture within the Smithsonian Institution.

The effort to construct a museum dedicated to African American history and culture began in the early 1900's by an association working to commemorate the valor and deed of Negro soldiers and sailors who fought in American wars and contributions of African Americans in science, art, literature, business and other endeavors.

I have conferred with African American constituents in Alaska regarding the significance of this bill—the late JP Jones, Bill Sykes, and James Hayes to name a few.

Today, we are taking an important step toward bringing this overdue effort closer to a reality.

The provisions of the bill direct the Smithsonian Institution Board of Regents to consult with the Commission on Fine Arts, the National Capitol Planning Commission, and three members of President Bush's Commission on the National Museum of African American History and Culture when selecting the museum site. The legislation directs the Board of Regents to complete this work within 18 months.

The legislation authorizes \$17 million in federal funds for the museum in fiscal year 2004. The funding for the museum will be fifty percent federal funding and the remaining fifty percent will come from non-federal sources.

I look forward to working with my colleagues as this bill moves through the legislative process.

PRESIDENTIAL SUPPORT OF RE-AUTHORIZATION OF ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, in 1994 President Clinton signed into law a ban on the production of certain semiautomatic assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines. The 1994 law banned a list of 19 specific weapons as well as a number of other weapons incorporating certain design characteristics, such as bayonets and pistol grips. This law is scheduled to sunset on September 13, 2004. If the law is not reauthorized, the production of military-style semiautomatic weapons can legally resume.

In March of this year, in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Attorney General John Ashcroft indicated the Bush administration's support for the current ban on assault weapons but would not indicate support for reauthorization of the ban. Recently, the White House indicated the President does support reauthorizing the ban. However, a senior White House adviser reportedly said that this bill would never make it to the President's desk. And a spokesperson for House Majority Leader TOM DELAY recently said "we have no intentions of bringing it up."

Failure to reauthorize the legislation would be irresponsible because the assault weapon ban works. According to National Institute of Justice statistics reported by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, gun trace requests for assault weapons declined 20 percent in the first calendar year after the ban took effect, dropping from 4,077 in 1994 to 3,268 in 1995. Over the same time period, gun murders declined only 10 percent and trace requests for all types of guns declined 11 percent.

Given the firepower of these firearms, it is not surprising that so many law enforcement organizations supported the Federal assault weapons ban and worked for its passage. Among the many that supported the ban were the Law Enforcement Steering Committee, the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Sheriffs' Association, the Inter-

national Association of Chiefs of Police, the Major City Chiefs Association, the International Brotherhood of Police Officers, the National Association of Police Organizations, the Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association, the National Black Police Association, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, the Police Executive Research Forum, and the Police Foundation.

It is critical that we reauthorize the assault weapons ban. Absent such action, AK47s, UZIs, and other semi-automatic weapons will again become easily obtainable weapons of choice for gang members, drug dealers, and other dangerous criminals. I urge the President to show his support for this bill by asking the House Republican Leadership to pass this bill in the House and the Senate Leadership to pass it in the Senate.

MEMORIAL DAY 2003

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, on this Memorial Day, I encourage New Mexicans to take a few moments to remember those Americans who have given their lives in the name of freedom. It is upon the sacrifice of these Americans—from all generations—that the freedom we enjoy today is built.

From the Bataan Peninsula to Normandy, from the Ia Drang Valley to Inchon, from Afghanistan to Iraq, and many other conflicts, American men and women have fought and died because they believed in their country and believed in preserving its many blessings.

As we enjoy this holiday weekend with our families and friends, let us take a few minutes to recognize the courage with which so many of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines have fought when called upon by their country. Let us also remember all those who never made it back to the country they loved because they gave their lives for it in a far away land.

At this moment in America's history, I could not be more proud of our men and women in uniform. I think it is important to note that in the wake of successful combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the same courage and commitment shown by Americans of generations past lives on today in the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Mr. GRAHAM of Florida. Mr. President, I rise to observe the significance of Memorial Day—and to pay tribute to the Americans we honor on this day. Three days from now, we will, as a nation, remember those who lost their lives in service to our country. They secured our freedom with the most precious gifts they could offer—their love for this country and their lives.

America has honored its fallen soldiers with a Memorial Day, sometimes called Decoration Day, since the Civil

War. Though we are grateful to these heroes every day of the year, we recognized that we ought to set aside one day in particular, the last Monday in May, to be especially mindful of the brave men and women who paid the ultimate price for our freedom.

At a time when our Nation mourns more sons and daughters than it did just a year ago, many of whom came from my State of Florida, this Memorial Day takes on additional poignancy. My heart is full of solemn gratitude to each new generation willing to risk their lives for the security of strangers.

We cannot merely make promises on this earnest occasion. We must reaffirm our commitment to the veteran soldiers still with us. We must provide full funding for veterans health care. At this moment in our Nation's history, how can we possibly justify anything but a significant increase in VA's health care budget? Not only have we been engaged in a war overseas, but, just this year, VA cut off enrollment to an entire category of veterans.

During a time when 240,000 veterans nationwide—44,000 in my home State of Florida alone—are being told they have to wait 6 months or longer just to see a doctor, how can we possibly turn our backs on these men and women? These veterans have come to VA seeking care—care we promised them they would get—and we owe it to them to fulfill that promise.

Memorial Day has a duality—at once provoking feelings of both somber meditation for those we have lost in battle and the joyous anticipation of celebrating with family and friends during a holiday weekend. Both reactions are fitting to the memories of those who are no longer with us—we remember and revere their service, and we honor what their sacrifice has brought us—the freedom to be with the people we love and hold dear.

As we and other citizens of this country prepare to enjoy the long weekend, let us take a moment to thank those who gave us a future, at the expense of their own.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the Senate has confirmed 127 judges nominated by President Bush, including 100 in the 17 months in which Democrats comprised the Senate majority. Twenty-seven have now been confirmed in the other 12 months in which Republicans have controlled the confirmation process under President Bush. This total of 127 judges confirmed for President Bush is more confirmations than the Republicans allowed President Clinton in all of 1995, 1996 and 1997—the 3 full years of his last term. In those 3 years, the Republican leadership in the Senate allowed only 111 judicial nominees to be confirmed, which included only 18 circuit court judges. We have already exceeded that total by 14 percent and the circuit court total by 33 percent be-

fore Memorial Day and with 7 months remaining this year.

The fact is that when Democrats became the Senate majority in the summer of 2001, we inherited 110 judicial vacancies. Over the next 17 months, despite constant criticism from the administration, the Senate proceeded to confirm 100 of President Bush's nominees, including several who were divisive and controversial, several who had mixed peer review ratings from the ABA and at least one who had been rated not qualified. Despite the additional 40 vacancies that arose, we reduced judicial vacancies to 60, a level below that termed "full employment" by Senator HATCH. Since the beginning of this year, in spite of the Republicans' fixation on the President's most controversial nominations, we have worked hard to reduce judicial vacancies even further. As of today, the number of judicial vacancies has been reduced to 44 and is the lowest it has been in 13 years. That is lower than at any time during the entire 8 years of the Clinton administration. We have already reduced judicial vacancies from 110 to 44, in 2 years. We have reduced the vacancy rate from 12.8 percent to 5.1 percent, the lowest it has been in the last two decades. With some cooperation from the administration think of the additional progress we could be making.

If the Senate did not confirm another judicial nominee all year and simply adjourned today, we would have treated President Bush more fairly and would have acted on more of his judicial nominees than Republicans did for President Clinton in 1995 to 1997. In addition, the 44 vacancies on the Federal courts around the country are significantly lower than the 80 vacancies Republicans left at the end of 1997. Of course, the Senate is not adjourning for the year and Chairman HATCH continues to hold hearings for Bush judicial nominees at a rate of between two and four times as many as he did for President Clinton's.

Unfortunately, far too many of this President's nominees raise serious concerns about whether they will be fair judges to all parties on all issues. Those types of nominees should not be rushed through the process. I invite the President to work with us and to nominate more mainstream individuals with proven records and bipartisan support.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. On May 1, 2003, Senator KENNEDY and I introduced the Local Law Enforcement Act, a bill that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

I would like to describe a terrible crime that occurred on February 22, 2003. An Arab-American teenager in

Yorba Linda, CA, was badly beaten by a group of teenagers with bats and golf clubs who were yelling racial slurs. He suffered head injuries, a broken jaw, and stab wounds. Metal plates had to be inserted into his face during reconstructive surgery, and his jaw was wired shut for nearly two months.

I believe that government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

SENIOR HEALTH AND FITNESS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I rise as chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging to discuss senior health and fitness. May is Older Americans Month and I feel that it is especially appropriate to mention two events occurring this month that help highlight healthy aging.

First, for the past 10 years, the last Wednesday in May has been designated as National Senior Health and Fitness Day. This year is no different and on Wednesday, May 28, 1,500 local organizations in every State of the Union, will again celebrate National Senior Health and Fitness Day, the Nation's largest annual health promotion event for older adults. Local organizations will host a variety of activities tailored to the needs and interests of their communities. Last year these activities included health walks, health screening, and a wide variety of other events. National Senior Health and Fitness Day is an excellent opportunity for seniors of all fitness levels to take part in locally organized health and fitness events. In my home State of Idaho, the Southwest Idaho Area Agency on Aging, the local YMCA, and a host of other organizations have teamed up to hold a walk in Boise. Idaho seniors will walk anywhere from 2 years, to 2 miles, depending on the participant's ability, a reminder that walking and being active are far more important than how far or how fast we travel.

Second, the 2003 Summer National Senior Games, the Senior Olympics, opens Monday, May 26, in Hampton Roads, VA. An estimated 10,000 senior athletes will come together to compete in a wide variety of sporting events ranging from horseshoes and shuffleboard to track and field and the triathlon. It is one of the largest multisport athletic competitions in the world. I especially salute the 15 Idahoans who will be competing. The Senior Olympians are examples to all of us.

The goals for Senior Day are to make exercise fun, to increase awareness of the benefits of a regular exercise program for older adults, and to encourage all older adults to take advantage of the many health and fitness programs